

Message Text

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PAGE 01 JIDDA 00483 220657Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-02 USIA-15 PRS-01 MCT-01
SSM-05 IO-13 /081 W

-----220702Z 009410 /16-43

R 201020Z JAN 77 CORRECTED COPY MRN

FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6937

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

UNCLAS JIDDA 0483

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y MRN (483 VICE 482)

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, SA, US

SUBJECT: SAUDI PRESS ON MIDDLE EAST TRAVEL OF SECRETARY VANCE AND
US PEACE EFFORTS

1. PARAGRAPH 2 CONTAINS THE TEXT OF AN EDITORIAL WHICH
APPEARED IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARAB NEWS JANUARY 19.
ON THE SUBJECT OF A MIDDLE EAST MISSION BY SECRETARY VANCE
AND US EFFORTS FOR A MIDDLE EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT.

2. BEGIN TEXT: VANCE'S ODYSSEY

THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT INCOMING U.S. SECRETARY OF
STATE CYRUS VANCE PLANS TO TOUR THE MIDDLE EAST WITHIN A
MONTH TO SIX WEEKS OF PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER'S INAUGURATION
DEMONSTRATES HOW SERIOUSLY THE NEW ADMINISTRATION REGARDS
THE PROSPECTS FOR A FINAL SETTLEMENT TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI CON-
FLICT. MR. CARTER HAS SAID ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT THE
CLIMATE HAS NEVER BEEN BETTER FOR A MIDDLE EAST PEACE
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SETTLEMENT. ON THIS POINT, IF NOTHING ELSE, HE IS IN AGREE-
MENT WITH FRENCH PRESIDENT VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING, WHO
HAS CALLED 1977 "THE YEAR OF PEACE" IN THE MIDDLE EAST.
MR. CARTER HIMSELF APPARENTLY WANTS TO STICK CLOSE TO HOME
DURING MOST OF 1977, TO LEARN THE ROPES AT THE WHITE HOUSE
AND ACCUSTOM HIMSELF TO THE BYZANTINE WAYS OF WASHING-
TION. HE IS SENDING AN EXPERIENCED AND TRUSTED DIPLOMAT TO

MAKE THE PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE PROSPECTS FOR A LASTING PEACE SETTLEMENT-INCLUDING A RETURN TO THE NEGOTIATIONS TABLE AT GENEVA.

MR. VANCE'S TOUR WILL BE FOLLOWED UP BY RETURN VISITS TO WASHINGTON BY VARIOUS MIDDLE EASTERN LEADERS. BY LATE SPRING OR EARLY SUMMER, MR. CARTER SHOULD HAVE A GOOD IDEA WHERE ALL THE PARTIES STAND. THE ISRAELI GENERAL ELECTIONS WILL BE OVER, AND, WITH A LITTLE LUCK, THE PUSH TOWARD A REGIONAL SETTLEMENT CAN BEGIN IN EARNEST.

THE INCLUSION OF SAUDI ARABIA IN MR. VANCE'S UPCOMING TOUR IS SIGNIFICANT IN SEVERAL RESPECTS. FIRST, IT INDICATES U.S. APPRECIATION FOR SAUDI ARABIA'S OIL PRICE STAND AT LAST MONTH'S OPEC CONFERENCE IN DOHA. THE KINGDOM HAS DONE A GREAT DEAL TO CUSHION THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER WESTERN NATIONS FROM THE EFFECTS OF RISING OIL PRICES, AND MR. CARTER SEEMS TO REALIZE THIS. AS A POLITICIAN AND FORMER BUSINESSMAN, HE KNOWS THAT FREE RIDES ARE LITTLE MORE THAN WISHFUL THINKING. THE NEW PRESIDENT IS APPARENTLY PREPARED FOR A KIND OF QUID-PRO-QUO TRADE-OFF WITH SAUDI ARABIA: SECURE AND REASONABLY PRICED ENERGY SUPPLIES IN EXCHANGE FOR U.S. PRESSURE ON ISRAEL TO REACH AN ACCOMMODATION WITH THE CONFRONTATION STATES. SECOND, THE UNITED STATES IS WELL AWARE OF SAUDI ARABIA'S INFLUENCE AMONG ITS FELLOW ARAB STATES. RECENT SAUDI DIPLOMATIC COUPS-INCLUDING THE LEBANESE CEASEFIRE AND THE EGYPT-SYRIA RECONCILIATION-HAVE DOUBTLESS CONVINCED THE AMERICANS THAT SAUDI ARABIA IS THE COUNTRY BEST ABLE TO ENCOURAGE JOINT ARAB

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CONSENT TO A JUST SETTLEMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. END TEXT
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, MINISTERIAL VISITS, PEACE PLANS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment:
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Disposition Event:
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Disposition Reason:
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Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770024-0050
Format: TEL
From: JIDDA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Line Count: 99
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29-Sep-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3550124
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SAUDI PRESS ON MIDDLE EAST TRAVEL OF SECRETARY VANCE AND US PEACE EFFORTS
TAGS: PFOR, SA, US, XF, (VANCE, CYRUS R)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/05f007d4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009